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THE METHODS  
OF  
DOGMATIC THEOLOGY,

*translated by John Drury*



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## FOREWORD

This little volume contains the paper which I read to the first postconciliar Conference of German Dogmatic Theologians (Munich, January 2-5, 1967). At the request of many, I am presenting the same paper here, almost unchanged, in the hope that it will reach a wider public.

The paper does not claim to be anything more than a preliminary probe. When one is delivering a paper at such a conference, there is a premium on succinctness. The things which are common knowledge to one's fellow theologians must be presumed from the start, or referred to in passing. For this reason I have deliberately chosen to stress several new aspects which, hopefully, will point the way to the future. These ideas must be complemented and developed from many different sides. Only then can they provide a starting point for the revitalized dogmatic theology which Vatican II called for.

I hope this book will contribute to the process of internal church renewal—in preaching, in dogmatic theology, in the life of faith. And I also hope it will stimulate and foster theological dialogue.

WALTER KASPER

## ABBREVIATIONS USED

AAMz *Abhandlungen of the Mainz Academy of Arts and Sciences.*

DS DENZINGER and SCHÖNMETZER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, Freiburg 1965<sup>33</sup>.

DTh *Divus Thomas*. Before 1914: *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und spekulative Theologie*. Since 1954: *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Theologie und Philosophie*, Fribourg.

DThC *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, Paris 1899 ff.

EnchB *Enchiridion Biblicum: Documenta ecclesiastica Sacram Scripturam spectantia*, Rome 1956<sup>3</sup>.

HThG *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe*, 2 Vols., edited by H. Fries, Munich 1962–63.

LThK *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Freiburg 1957<sup>2</sup> ff.

MThZ *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift*.

ThRv *Theologische Revue*, Münster.

ZKTh *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* (Innsbruck), Vienna.

ZThK *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, Tübingen.

## THE PRESENT CRISIS

Methodology is not discussed too frequently in present-day theology. Indeed it might seem that abstract, academic discussions of methodology should take a back seat to more pressing problems, problems which directly relate to the present-day crisis of faith and to the Church's pressing needs. But the fact is that it is not merely this particular dogma or that particular reform which has been called into question. What have been called into question are the fundamental principles of faith itself and the possibility of saying anything about God.

Theology can tackle this situation only by taking a close look at fundamentals once again. It must spell out the fundamental issues for itself once again. Is it still possible for theology to speak about God? How can it do this? How should it do so? Theology must take a new look at its methods.

Even the present situation within theology itself seems to call for such a revaluation. There

is a growing splintering of methods within one and the same discipline and by one and the same theologian. At one point the dogmatic theologian may utilize exegetical, historical and philosophical arguments; at another point he may adopt a pastoral, an anthropological, or a sociological approach. But if dogmatic theology is to avoid dilettantism, if it is to remain a scientific discipline, then it must look for the one dogmatic method.

Various statements of Vatican II have brought this problem to a head, for the Council did more than raise specific issues which might still be solved with the traditional methods and within the classical framework. Basically, Vatican II called for a new theology,<sup>1</sup> a dogmatic methodology that was more biblically and pastorally oriented.<sup>2</sup>

But what does “pastoral” mean? Presumably it does not mean that theology is to be less rigorously scientific in its methods, that its tools are to undergo adaptation without any effort being

<sup>1</sup>The Decree on Training for the Priesthood (n. 17), *Optatam Totius Ecclesiae*, expressly calls for a revision of teaching methods in theology.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, n. 16. Cf: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, n. 24f; Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 19; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 44, 62; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, n. 39.

made to use them meaningfully and properly. Presumably it does not preclude the possibility of thinking in theological terms, nor favor the amateurish imitation of profane disciplines. If the conciliar statements mean anything, then they are demanding that theology take a methodical, scientific look at the pastoral element in theology, at the operative and pragmatic (in the best sense of the word) element which is part and parcel of the truth.

Even more important than the Council's infrequent allusions to theological methodology is the new spirit which pervades its statements and declarations. Dogmatic theology as a whole is presented as being more dynamic, more catholic, more oriented to this world and the future; moreover, in many respects, it is portrayed as something possessing less certainty than heretofore.

A real crisis now confronts the basic foundation of theology. Justifiable criticism of the a-worldliness of theology in the past now threatens to drive us to the other extreme, to give rise to a secular theology which has no real tradition.<sup>3</sup> We can no longer avoid discussing

<sup>3</sup>See the remarks of J. RATZINGER in *Herder-Korrespondenz*, 1966, 20:491.

the principles and the basic criteria of theological argumentation. Methodical examination of the foundations of theology is a most urgent task for post-conciliar theology.

This new attention to methodology is necessarily confronted with the claims to methodological precision that are made by modern science. In its understanding of reality and truth, our age is strongly influenced by science and technology; and the essence of science is its methodology. Science hunts out a definite and specified item of knowledge by following an ordered, well laid out road which provides for critical reflection and revaluation all along the way. It is the art of selecting and abstracting data, after confining oneself to a very definite questioning process.

This modern attentiveness to methodology has created a critical situation, not only for theology but for all intellectual disciplines. For neither theology nor philosophy can follow a methodology such as described above. The real object of their inquiry is not ascertainable and repeatable; nor do they deal with a sharply delimited portion of total reality as the other sciences do.

To be sure, theology does make use of certain specific methods—historical, philological, etc.—and it dare not try to dispense with them. But to be theology, it must say something about God and his Word. Using the methods of historical and philological criticism, we can claim that here and there in history God spoke and acted thus and so, and not otherwise. That is about as far as we can go with these methods, but that is not yet theology.

Theology belongs to a realm which tradition sums up under the word *sapientia* (wisdom). Through it we savor (*sapere*), we come to know, “the glory of God shining on the face of Christ Jesus” (2 Cor 4, 6). This is the type of experience which is proper to theology, and the modern-day emphasis on truth requires that this experience be given a new, more intensive form of methodological self-verification. For even though theology cannot simply appropriate one or other of the secular methods, it is not a purely whimsical process either. Theology, too, must be rigorous and serious. It, too, must draw reasonable conclusions. It, too, must use exactness in posing and answering questions. Theology, too, has its methods.

Long before Hegel and Heidegger, Aristotle

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realized that methodology is something more than a scientific technique applied from without, something more than an ordered, methodical way of proceeding in order to reach sound, coherent judgments about some specific portion of reality. The way to truth (*methodos*) can only be truth itself. Even in his quest for the truth, the investigator must be enlightened by truth.

Thus questions of methodology are always questions about the subject itself. Aristotle makes this clear at the start of his *Metaphysics*: "If thinkers proceeded in this way, the subject itself led them to the right road and guided their inquiry . . . Thinkers were carried along by truth itself."<sup>4</sup> The method, then, is the signpost and the guide on the road to truth; and it is provided by truth itself. Methodology is a conscious re-collection along the way that truth is accompanying us; it thereby enables us to reconnoiter and explore the road on which truth is leading us.

As Aristotle sees it, truth serves as a signpost by showing us the perplexities and wrong turns made by earlier inquiries,<sup>5</sup> by inducing us to reflect critically on the history of past research. Only tradition, dominated as it is by the quest

<sup>4</sup>ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, 984b.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 995a-b.

for truth, can put us on the road where the search for truth is made.

No one starts from scratch. The heritage of tradition situates us within a very definite horizon of truth. Tradition discloses the truth and touches off the quest for it, but at the same time it also hides the truth. The answers of tradition can never fully handle the questions to which tradition gives rise; indeed, they often obstruct these questions and maintain a stranglehold on them.<sup>6</sup> Historical reflection on the questions of the past leads inevitably to further exploration of the new and more radical possibilities of comprehending truth. Tradition sets us on the road

<sup>6</sup>These remarks derive from the insights we have gained into the historical and linguistic nature of human knowledge, as developed in the later philosophy of Heidegger. According to this view, human knowledge evolves in a specific linguistic horizon that is handed down through history; this horizon involves a specific understanding of being at any given moment and excludes other possible interpretation. Being as such is historical: that is, it is expounded linguistically with varying emphases, "tones" and "colors" at any given point in time.

With this insight, the modern approach is bypassed for a transcendental, existential analysis. The notion of historicity posited here involves more than the purely subjective historicity of man himself; it embraces reality as a whole and being as such. Thus it includes society, institutions and the world. Human historicity, however, is the locus where the history of being comes to a head.

On this notion of the history of being, see: O. PÖGGELE, *Der Denkweg Martin Heideggers*, Pfullingen 1963, pp. 135-42, 280-99; M. MÜLLER, *Existenzphilosophie im geistigen Leben der Gegenwart*, Heidelberg 1964<sup>3</sup>, pp. 32-52, 174-77; B. WELTE, "Ein Vorschlag zur Methode der Theologie heute," in *Auf der Spur des Ewigen*, Freiburg 1965, pp. 416-19.

to seek truth and, in so doing, it opens up new pathways for future theology. Thus a deliberate examination of theology's methods must necessarily be a critical appraisal of the pathways which theology has trod up to now.

Because of the dimensions of the present crisis, we must do more than focus on the critical examination of theological methodology which has been going on in recent decades. In the 20s an important concern was the nature of theology as a scholarly discipline; in the 30s it was the development of a kerygmatic theology. These questions have cropped up again, in modified form, in the quest for a pastorally oriented theology. But we shall have to broaden the base of this inquiry, to investigate all the vital questions that have arisen in the history of modern theology as our present-day methodology took shape.

Imposing difficulties stand in the way of this historical reflection. The history of Catholic theology in modern times remains unexplored to a large extent. The intellectual currents in theology during the late seventeenth and eighteenth century are scarcely clear to us at all. In the history of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theology, major re-evaluations are under way or very much in order.

If we simply look at the broad outlines of this research, we are forced to conclude that it is not only specific eras and specific theologians which need thorough investigation, that in reality we must rewrite the whole history of modern theology from the ground up. The valuable and indispensable presentations of M. J. Scheeben and M. Grabmann provide merely a prelude to the history of neo-scholasticism. More and more it is coming to be regarded as an episode and a respectable expedient, but not as the intrinsic goal of modern developments. A revised theological appraisal of the intellectual currents in modern thought is greatly to be desired. An objective presentation of modern theology requires that theology revise its estimation of the history of thought in modern times.

Because of the difficulties just mentioned, the following observations and remarks will have to be corrected and developed further in many respects. Much will remain hypothetical and provisional. But our aim here is not history for its own sake. It is to shed the light of history on the present status of our inquiries. All we can seek to do is to trace some of the main lines which will help us to comprehend our present situation in theology more clearly.

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This, then, is merely a first attempt to push forward and to present a few points of view. Many others will have to contribute their time and effort before a new outlook can be fully developed. So let us begin by exploring the background of ideas which led to our present methodology in dogmatic theology.

## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The present methodology of dogmatic theology involves three steps: 1, presentation of the Church's teaching; 2, appeal to Scripture and tradition to prove or support this teaching; 3, speculative exploration of it.<sup>1</sup> Thus at least two, if not three, different procedures are involved.

Today we take this three-pronged methodology so much for granted that we readily forget its relatively late appearance in the history of theology. We cannot place it earlier than the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Only then did the neo-scholastic theses take shape from the pre-scholastic *lectio scripturae*, the medieval *quaestio* (inserted into the *lectio*), and the *disputatio* of baroque scholasticism. Whatever didactic and mnemonic advantages this thesis approach may have had, it certainly did not represent an integrated formal methodology which gave unity to dogmatic

<sup>1</sup>The most detailed description of this procedure is by B. DURST, "Zur theologischen Methode," in *ThRv*, 1927, 26: 297-313; 361-72.

<sup>2</sup>Y. CONGAR, "Théologie," in *DThC*, XV/1, 432f.

investigation. If it provided any kind of unity or cohesion at all, it was a purely material, external unity.

How did we arrive at this threefold procedure? At the very beginning thinkers saw only two essential elements in dogmatic methodology, faith and reason (or authority and reason), and these two elements coalesced into one unified whole.<sup>3</sup>

- Faith is never simply an affirmation of belief. As
- a human act, it is something understood and
- accepted; it is incipient theology.<sup>4</sup> The *ratio theologica* is nothing more than the spelling out of faith's immanent implications, the unfolding of its inner logic.<sup>5</sup>

Taken together, faith and reason form the two eyes of theology (J. Döllinger), which itself is

- one. Theology is reflective perception and mediative hearing of the Word, seeking to give an answer to itself and to everyone who asks a

<sup>3</sup>M. GRABMANN, *Die Geschichte der scholastischen Methode*, I, Freiburg 1909, pp. 32ff; J. BEUMER, *Theologie als Glaubensverständnis*, Würzburg 1953.

<sup>4</sup>K. RAHNER, "Theologie im Neuen Testament," in *Schriften zur Theologie*, V, Einsiedeln 1962, 38f; B. WELTE, *Heilsverständnis: Philosophische Untersuchung einiger Voraussetzungen zum Verständnis des Christentums*, Freiburg 1966, pp. 27–62.

<sup>5</sup>B. WELTE, "Die Wesensstruktur der Theologie als Wissenschaft," in *Auf der Spur des Ewigen*, Freiburg 1965, pp. 353–58; H. FRIES, "Theologie," in *HThG*, II, 644f, 648f; J. B. METZ, "Theologie," in *LThK*, 1965, X, 67f.

reason for its hope (1 Pet 3, 15). Theology is a systematically developed *intellectus fidei, fides quaerens intellectum* (Anselm of Canterbury).

*Fides* and *intellectus, auctoritas* and *ratio*, formed a unity up as far as the high Middle Ages. It was the Aristotelian concept of knowledge that drove a wedge between them,<sup>6</sup> and this was carried further by Nominalism in the late Middle Ages.<sup>7</sup> Gradually the modern critical outlook took shape. If the terms of tradition were only *nomina*, then they possessed no authority. Reason now sought its own direct and immediate approach to reality, and it was critical of tradition in the process. Authority and reason were set farther and farther apart, and confined to separate compartments.

This outlook led to a seemingly unconditioned, rational, mathematico-scientific method on the one hand, and to fideism, biblicism and intuitive mysticism on the other hand. The divorce of authority and reason necessarily influenced the concept of theology itself; it led to the dissociation of theology's two essential elements. The resultant tension was made more complicated and acute by the conflict between

<sup>6</sup>J. BEUMER, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-93.

<sup>7</sup>Y. CONGAR, *op. cit.*, pp. 406ff.

historical scholarship and scholastic thought, in which modern theology became enmeshed.

At the origin of modern theology lay two intellectual movements which were kindred in many ways, even though they also contradicted

- each other in various respects. These two movements, Humanism and the Reformation, were to have a profound effect on the shape of modern theology. Despite their differences and antipathies, they both shared the same outlook on one point, and it is a point which is very relevant
- to our discussion here. Both opposed scholasticism's use of rational argumentation in theology and the scholastic method in general.
- The opposition of Humanism derived from its new historical outlook on truth. The opposition of the reformationists was based on theological reasons: they defined the relationship between faith and reason in a new way and appealed to Scripture alone.

This bilateral opposition to the existing theological methodology was to have a major effect on modern Catholic theology, as J. E. Kuhn pointed out a century ago.<sup>8</sup> Time and again Catholic theology tried to latch onto the reformatory notions of Humanism. It was attempted

<sup>8</sup>J. E. KUHN, *Katholische Dogmatik*, I, Tübingen 1859<sup>2</sup>, pp. 438-89.

in the work of Francisco de Vittoria and Melchior Cano (fifteenth to sixteenth century), in the French *humanisme dévot* of Cardinal Bérulle, and in the eighteenth-century school of French theology (by D. Petavius in particular). The same effort was carried on by the theology of the Enlightenment and by J. M. Sailer. It also found echoes in the Tübingen school and in the reform-minded theology at the turn of the century.

But the impetus for renewal never managed to carry the day. Again and again it was kindled by the needs of apologetics, since the arguments of Protestantism against scholasticism had to be rebutted. As early as Melchior Cano we find this argument against the humanists and the reformationists: "Contempt for scholasticism and the plague of heresy are truly connected with one another; they always have been, ever since scholastic discipline took shape."<sup>9</sup> J. Kleutgen, a staunch proponent of neo-scholasticism in the nineteenth century, argued in the same vein. He asserted that the scholastic method had to be

<sup>9</sup>M. CANO, *Loci theologici*, VIII, c. 1; cited by A. LANG in *Die loci theologici des Melchior Cano und die Methode des dogmatischen Beweises* (Munich Studies in Historical Theology, Volume 6), Munich 1925, p. 155, footnote 4.

maintained for the sake of the faith and the Church.<sup>10</sup>

Catholic orthodoxy and scholastic methodology seemed to be identical with one another. Modern historical thinking and the Catholic faith, on the other hand, seemed to be congenital opponents. Thus an unfortunate bond was forged between the humanist problem concerning the historical nature of truth and the reformationist problem concerning the ecclesial nature of theology.

This tragic conflict, which was produced by the reformationist schism, gave rise to many senseless and erroneous stances both inside and outside the Church. The result was an apologetical theology that lacked historical perspective and often took a wrong stand. It was often unable to distinguish between scholastic philosophy and church doctrine, and it failed to appreciate the fact that its aims could also be achieved in a different conceptual framework. In the last century in particular, we find a fruitless clash between different theological schools (e.g. between German and Roman theology).

Eventually there arose a clash within dogmatic

<sup>10</sup>J. KLEUTGEN, *Die Theologie der Vorzeit*, I, Münster 1867, pp. 36ff.

methodology itself. It splintered into two parts: an historical-positivist approach versus a scholastic-speculative approach. From all this arose the basic problem facing modern theology, a problem whose dimensions we are only beginning to face up to today. Its resolution is not yet within sight. How are we to determine the relationship between historical truth and universally valid principles?

This tension between the modern historical outlook and scholasticism was also responsible for the third feature of modern theological methodology: the peculiarly dogmatic and ecclesiastical character of dogmatic theology. By holding fast to scholastic methodology, the conceptual framework and methodology of theology became more and more estranged from the mainstream of intellectual developments. More and more theology saw itself standing over against other areas of scientific study which could no longer be integrated.

One such area of study was church history itself. When it was presented in the framework of historical criticism, it was often not easy to integrate it with theology. The outlook and conceptual framework of reformationist theology

and modern thought were alien to the Church's theologians. In this new situation theology had to defend and represent a universal claim to truth, when this claim had in reality become something much narrower. As a result, theology took on a new shape and became heavily dogmatic in character.

As E. Rothaker and H. G. Gadamer have shown,<sup>11</sup> this dogmatic cast was a peculiarly modern phenomenon. A given position becomes dogmatic in character when it is challenged by another viewpoint and must uphold its claim to absolute, universal truth in a "dogmatic" way. This explains why we encounter a *theologia dogmatica* only from the seventeenth century on. And this new emphasis on the ecclesiastical character of dogma could easily degenerate into doctrinaire clericalism and excessive concern for the magisterium. It could easily foster a ghetto outlook and make dialogue impossible both within the Church and outside. A tendency towards dogmatism and suspicion of other viewpoints is simply a fact, and it cannot be overlooked.

Thus the problem of historicity and the prob-

<sup>11</sup>E. ROTHAKER, *Die dogmatische Denkform in den Geisteswissenschaften und das Problem des Historismus*, (AAMz, Vol. 6), Mainz 1954; H. G. GADAMER, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Tübingen 1965<sup>2</sup>, pp. 487ff.

lem of ecclesiasticism plagued the theology of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The perplexing issue which lay at the foundation of modern theology now stood out in the open. In the first half of the nineteenth century, theologians in Tübingen, Münster, Munich and Vienna strove to develop a theology that was both ecclesial (in the best sense of the word) and imbued with a sound theological liberalism. It was a theology produced by original minds who were at ease in the intellectual currents of their time. Men like Möhler and Döllinger championed the cause of the Church, but they were open-minded men who were recognized and respected by other contemporary scholars.

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, however, a fateful development took place. The lines of opposition took on sharper definition. A new brand of ecclesiasticism came to the fore; it regarded history as something which was dangerous and could not be assimilated. The "modern" world was regarded as an instance of deterioration.<sup>12</sup> Even in this new environment we find towering figures: Franzelin, Scheeben,

<sup>12</sup>On this new upheaval see especially B. WELTE, "Zum Strukturwandel der katholischen Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Auf der Spur des Ewigen*, Freiburg 1965, pp. 380-409.

Billot; but it is worth noting that Scheeben's work came into real prominence only in the 1930s. Before this, however, the tragic controversy over Modernism arose. Men like Newman, Schell, Hügel and Adam were viewed with suspicion and censured to a greater or lesser degree.

These lines of opposition have now become meaningless and superfluous for the most part. Vatican II has provided wide scope for historical perspectives within theology.<sup>13</sup> Cautiously and tentatively, but clearly and unmistakably, it has opened the door to modern thought.<sup>14</sup> Most importantly, it has provided greater scope for freedom within the Church, and it has clearly affirmed the possibility and the necessity of pluralism in theology.<sup>15</sup>

Parallel developments have taken place in other areas of church scholarship. Scholasticism has acquired greater historical depth in the school

<sup>13</sup>Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, n. 12, 15, 19; Decree on Training for the Priesthood, *Optatam Totius Ecclesiae*, n. 16.

<sup>14</sup>Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 4-10 and, in particular, n. 11, 42, 44; Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*, n. 1f.

<sup>15</sup>Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 54; Decree on Ecumenism, n. 4; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, n. 22.

of C. Baeumker and M. Grabmann. Through the efforts of J. Maréchal, speculative philosophy has acquired new vitality; it now seems that essential ingredients of the modern outlook can be legitimately assimilated into scholasticism. Because of these developments, theological renewal need not necessarily be anti-scholastic. Instead it can refer back gratefully to the past tradition of early scholasticism in order to overcome the perplexities of neo-scholasticism.

So an entirely new situation confronts us. It is now possible for us to ponder the present-day methods of theology afresh and to push on with the unresolved questions confronting it. Now is the hour, it seems, for a fresh start from the ground up.

In the following chapters, we shall examine the separate stages of dogmatic methodology. By thinking through their problems, we may manage to arrive at a single, unified epistemological process that is proper to theology. So let us start with the problem of the ecclesiastical nature of dogmatic theology—with its dogmatic character.

## THEOLOGY'S STARTING POINT

When we come to consider the origins of the concept of dogmatic theology, we must refer to the investigations of O. Ritschl.<sup>1</sup> They are indispensable, even though they may be incomplete and in need of supplementary work. The notion of dogmatic theology arose in the seventeenth century. It served to distinguish this theology from moral theology, which was now establishing itself as an independent discipline, and from speculative scholastic theology. Only later would it combine positive and speculative methods in its approach.

Dogmatic theology accorded with the new intellectual outlook of that era. Rejecting the exuberance of the baroque outlook, neo-classicism stressed simplicity and unpretentiousness

<sup>1</sup>O. RITSCHL, "Literaturhistorische Bemerkungen über die Nomenklatur der theologischen Disziplinen im 17. Jahrhundert," in *Studien zur systematischen Theologie* (Festschrift for Theodor Haering's seventieth birthday), edited by F. Traub, Tübingen 1918, pp. 76-86; *idem*, "Das Wort *dogmaticus* in der Geschichte des Sprachgebrauchs bis zum Aufkommen des Ausdrucks *theologia dogmatica*," in *Festgabe für J. Kaftan*, Tübingen 1920, pp. 260-72.

once again. People had grown tired of theological bickering, so they appealed to the teaching office of the Church, to dogma and the articles of faith. The disputes raging between different schools of thought were thrust aside as mere theological opinions. As a result, more and more emphasis was placed on the Church, or the magisterium, and its normative function in matters of faith.

The *Theologia Wirceburgensis* (1771) presented the Church as the proximate norm of faith, giving it precedence over Scripture and tradition, the two remote norms of faith.<sup>2</sup> The Church's teaching office now became the immediate source for theology. As a result, people were necessarily drawn away and alienated from the pristine sources.<sup>3</sup> This viewpoint would have been foreign to patristic and early medieval theology, which regarded sacred doctrine as *sacra scriptura* and *sacra pagina*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>See W. KASPER, *Die Lehre von der Tradition in der Römischen Schule* (*Die Ueberlieferung in der neueren Theologie*, Vol. 5), Freiburg 1962, pp. 10-47.

<sup>3</sup>PIUS XII, Encyclical *Humani Generis* (August 12, 1950), DS 3886: "Rejuvenating forces continually stream into theology from its sacred sources. On the other hand, speculation which neglects the task of exploring the deposit of faith proves to be unfruitful, as experience shows us."

<sup>4</sup>J. DE GHELLINCK, "Pagina et *Sacra Pagina*: Histoire d'un mot et transformation de l'objet primitivement désigné," in *Mélanges Auguste Pelzer*, Louvain 1947, pp. 23-59.

Whatever the advantages of this new approach may have been, it led to a positivistic theology rooted in the magisterium. It was a theology based on encyclicals and citations in Denzinger. It fostered a rigid concept of orthodoxy because it was no longer in direct contact with its pristine, life-giving sources: Scripture and tradition. The ecclesiastical cast of Catholic theology, however, seemed to call for neglect of these sources.

Now Vatican II has provided us with a view of the Church and ecclesiality that is essentially more open, more dynamic and more catholic. This new view must necessarily have profound consequences for the methodology of dogmatic theology. Our understanding of dogma and dogmatic theology must be affected by our newly won realization that the Church is an eschatological entity, a reality in the making, a promise as yet unfulfilled, an instrument of service, not an end in itself.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 6, 8f, 14f, 48-51. Also see K. RAHNER, "Kirche und Parusie Christi," in *Schriften zur Theologie*, VI, Einsiedeln 1965, pp. 348-67.

On the servant character of the Church see the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 5, 17, 36; Decree on Ecumenism, n. 2 and *passim*.

Seen in this light, dogma can only be regarded as a relative, historical reality of purely functional significance. Dogma is relative *insofar* as it serves and points to the pristine Word of God,<sup>6</sup> and *insofar* as it is tied up with the questioning process of a given era, contributing to the proper understanding of the Gospel in wholly concrete situations. Dogma itself, and the speculative reflection of dogmatic theology, must be viewed in terms of these two overriding considerations which go beyond them.

If this is done, then dogmatic theology becomes a hermeneutic activity, a process of translation. It stands midway between two poles: the Word of revelation in Scripture and the present-day realities of Christian proclamation. Dogmatic theology serves our present-day responsibility for the Word that was spoken once for all time. Its task is to show that this Word can be understood, made operative, and brought to fulfillment today. To state it in methodological terms: dogmatic theology has exegesis as its

<sup>6</sup>Dogma is not relative in every respect by any means. Rather, it shares the eschatological-definitive character of Christian revelation, and its historical cast. Dogma exemplifies the trait of "already here" and "yet to come" which characterize the whole existence of the Church in this world. On this see: W. KASPER, *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*, Mainz 1965, pp. 126-38.

starting point and missionary proclamation as its goal.<sup>7</sup>

From this we must conclude that dogma is neither the starting point nor the end point for dogmatic theology. Dogmatic theology is not simply the exegesis of dogmas or of citations in Denzinger, much less pure apologetics. Dogmatic theology is a function of the Church; she constantly renews her dogmatic awareness of the faith at its sources and makes it a living awareness by carrying out her mission today.

- If dogma and dogmatic theology are to fulfil these mediating functions, we can lay down two methodological requirements which are in perfect accord with the letter and the spirit of the conciliar documents.

The first concerns the pre-eminent role of Scripture. Having attributed a purely functional role of service to the Church and its magisterium, Vatican II demands that Scripture be given the pre-eminent position. Scripture participates in the historical "once for all time" of revelation.

<sup>7</sup>K. RAHNER, "Biblische Theologie," in *LThK*, II, 1958, 449–51; E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Offenbarung und Theologie*, Mainz 1965, pp. 136–56; L. SCHEFFCZYK, "Die Auslegung der hl. Schrift als dogmatische Aufgabe," in *MThZ*, 1964, 15: 190–204; W. KASPER, "Exegese, Dogmatik, Verkündigung," in *Diakonia*, 1966, 1: 3–12.

As a canon, it is the valid and normative attestation of God's Word. In terms of time and authority, it stands before and above all other witnesses to the faith. It is the *norma normans non normata*.

The conciliar texts further state that Scripture must be the soul of theology.<sup>8</sup> It must be the formal, life-giving principle (*hegemonikon*) of theology. The initiative and the whole questioning process must start from Scripture; we should not go back to Scripture to find arguments for theses and concepts that have been laid down beforehand.<sup>9</sup> In the correct interpretation of Scripture, dogma renders valuable service in many instances; it provides the proper emphasis and clears up simple misunderstandings. But Scripture is not to be utilized within the framework of the Church's teaching; on the contrary, the teaching of the Church must be presented

<sup>8</sup>LEO XIII, Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (November 18, 1893), *EnchB*, n. 114; BENEDICT XV, Encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus* (September 15, 1920), *EnchB*, n. 483; Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, n. 24; Decree on Training for the Priesthood, *Optatam Totius Ecclesiae*, n. 16.

<sup>9</sup>The Decree on Training for the Priesthood spells this out in n. 16: "Dogmatic theology should be so arranged that the biblical themes are proposed *first of all*. Then the contribution made by the Fathers of the Eastern and Western Church to the faithful transmission and development of individual truths of revelation should be shown to the students, along with the later history of dogma, with due attention being paid to its relationship to the general history of the Church . . . "

within the framework of Scripture's testimony.

→ This means not only that dogma must further the interpretation of Scripture, but also that the interpretation of dogma must proceed from Scripture.<sup>10</sup>

If we accept the notion that Scripture must be the "soul" of theology, we shall have to emend the dogmatic approach which developed over the last 200 years. We shall have to cast a critical eye on the tripartite approach mentioned earlier, and return to the tradition of the church Fathers and the early Middle Ages. The difficult problems which arise at this point today cannot be tackled here.

According to Catholic teaching, the confrontation or counter-balancing of Church and Scripture can never be absolute; it can only be relative. Scripture must be read as the Church's book.<sup>11</sup> And the letter and spirit of the conciliar texts indicate that we must adopt a new methodological approach with regard to the ecclesial character of scriptural interpretation.

This brings us to the second methodological requirement, which is based on the service role

<sup>10</sup>M. LÖHRER, "Ueberlegungen zur Interpretation lehramtlicher Aussagen als Frage des ökumenischen Gesprächs," in *Gott in Welt (Festgabe for Karl Rahner) II*, Freiburg 1964, pp. 499–523.

<sup>11</sup>DS: 1507, 3007, 3281, 3884, 3886ff etc; Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, n. 8–10, 12.

of dogmatic statements. The conciliar Church sees itself as a missionary church.<sup>12</sup> Its dogmas and its interpretations of Scripture are not ends in themselves; their purpose is to serve the worldwide mission of the Church. This means that the Church must do more than preserve the purity of its doctrine *intra mures*, not allowing itself to be disturbed by the unbelief of the outside world. In bearing witness to the faith, it must render service to human society and try to answer the questions of mankind.<sup>13</sup> Theology cannot be an intramural exercise in dogmatic or scriptural exegesis; as such, it would be an alien voice in today's world, speaking an esoteric tongue.

In short, the starting point for theology is the testimony of Scripture, read and interpreted in terms of the questions being asked by our contemporaries.<sup>14</sup> Viewed in the light of its specific

<sup>12</sup>Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 16f; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, n. 35f.

<sup>13</sup>Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 40, 58, 76, 89, *passim*.

<sup>14</sup>*Gaudium et Spes* not only says that the Church can and must give answers to contemporary questions from the Bible (n. 3f, 10f, 22, 40, 42f, *passim*); it also stresses the hermeneutic role which contemporary questions can play in clarifying the meaning of the Gospel (40, 44, 62); Decree on Training for the Priesthood, n. 16; Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life, n. 19.

A criteriological development of the hermeneutic function of the "signs of the times" is greatly to be desired for a new dogmatic methodology. The traditional *loci theologici* are greatly in need of development in this area.

duty, systematic theology must have a different perspective when it tackles Scripture than does historicocritical exegesis.

Systematic theology needs the help of pure exegesis, to be sure, for it must come to know the outlook, the aim and the scope of Scripture's testimony; and it must avoid illegitimate interpretations. But the real concerns of systematic theology are the questions asked by the Church today and the questions put to the Church today. In short, we must deal with questions that have really been put to us, not simply with questions we have formulated within the context of our professional discipline. All too often we answer questions that have not been asked, and we do not know how to answer the real questions that have been put to us.

A theology is not really ecclesial if it simply maintains its theses within the solidarity of the believing community. That is a necessary presupposition, but it is not the ultimate goal. A theology is truly ecclesial only when it realizes its solidarity with unbelievers as well, when it regards their questions as questions directed to its own faith.<sup>15</sup> The authentic ecclesial and

<sup>15</sup>J. B. METZ, "Kirche für die Ungläubigen," in *Umkehr und Erneuerung: Kirche nach dem Konzil*, edited by Th. Filthaut, Mainz 1966, pp. 312-29.

missionary responsibility of theology requires that it embark on the road of experiment and risk.

Once we realize that the real ecclesial and dogmatic character of dogmatic theology involves these two relationships (with Scripture and with contemporary questions), then we may say that dogmatic theology can and must exercise a legitimate critical function within the Church. It need not necessarily set out to justify everything that is actually found in the Church; it can also serve as a corrective.<sup>16</sup> This relative view of theology is in accord with the best in church tradition.

Let us summarize what we have just said about theology's starting point:

1. The starting point for theology is the faith of the Church; by definition, this faith has a relationship with the normative witness of Scripture, and it must be integrated into the contemporary process of Christian proclamation. Dogmatic theology serves this hermeneutic process.
2. In view of this hermeneutic function, dogmatic theology is *fides quaerens intellectum*. Its

<sup>16</sup>H. FRIES, "Theologie," in *HThG*, II, 646; H. KÜNG, "Theologie und Kirche," in *Theologische Meditationen*, III, Einsiedeln 1964.

starting point and its basic structure is the *quaestio*,<sup>17</sup> the living process of questioning which faith carries out vis-à-vis the world. It is not the *thesis*, which corresponds more to a Church plagued with the dream of triumphalism.

Our next step is to follow the methodological procedure of dogma in action. We shall consider the role of history in theology and the relationship between truth and history.

<sup>17</sup>This does not and should not mean that we can *only* have a "theology of question marks". The *Quaestio* is the typical form of medieval theology at its high point. But an essential part of the *Quaestio* was the *Respondeo dicendum*, that is, the thesis. This thesis, however, must be an answer to a real question that has already been posed by men; only then will it be able to be comprehended and assimilated.

## HISTORY AND THEOLOGY

Theology is grounded on a positive, historical revelation which is accessible to us only through the historical testimony of the apostolic and (in a different way) the post-apostolic Church. Thus the historical argument from authority is constitutive for theology, while this does not hold true for philosophy. But the concrete shape of this argument, the weight attached to it, and the opinions held regarding it, have varied greatly over the course of history.

In the Middle Ages, authorities (*auctoritates*) were an essential element in every intellectual discipline. Medieval culture developed through the reception and assimilation of authoritative tradition. But the great theologians of the high Middle Ages were wise enough to distinguish between the numerous *authorities* (Scripture, the church Fathers, the Councils, etc.) and the one *authority* of the Lord, who was living and present in the faith of the scripturally based Church.

Ratzinger<sup>1</sup> has shown this to be the case with St Bonaventure. Y. Congar,<sup>2</sup> E. Schillebeeckx<sup>3</sup> and many others<sup>4</sup> have proved the same point with Thomas Aquinas.

The plethora of authorities had the simple task of representing and exemplifying the one real authority. They should not be mistakenly equated with our modern "proofs from Scripture and tradition." Such proofs were not needed by the medieval Christian, except in the case of certain peripheral issues like iconoclasm and poverty: medieval Christianity lived its tradition and had no need of proofs.

- The latent danger in this method broke to the surface at various points in the late Middle Ages, when tradition was no longer taken for granted
- at the start. Theology drew apart more and more from its biblical and historical origins. The

<sup>1</sup>J. RATZINGER, "Wesen und Weisen der auctoritas im Werk des hl. Bonaventura," in *Die Kirche und ihre Aemter und Stände* (Festgabe for Cardinal Frings), Cologne 1960, pp. 58–72.

<sup>2</sup>Y. CONGAR, "Traditio und Sacra doctrina bei Thomas von Aquin," in *Kirche und Ueberlieferung* (Festschrift for Joseph R. Geisemann), edited by J. Betz and H. Fries, Freiburg 1960, pp. 170–210.

<sup>3</sup>E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Offenbarung und Theologie*, Mainz 1905, pp. 178–91.

<sup>4</sup>J. DE GHELLINCK, "Patristique et argument de tradition au bas moyen-âge," in *Aus der Geisteswelt des Mittelalters* (Festschrift for M. Grabmann), I, Münster 1935, pp. 403–26; M. D. CHENU, "'Authentica' et 'Magistralia,'" in *La theologie au XII siècle*, Paris 1957, pp. 351–65.

powerful fortress of late medieval theology no longer rested on a secure foundation.<sup>5</sup>

Hence Humanism's appeal to the *fontes* was more than justified, and the necessity of returning to Scripture and earlier tradition in the reformationist dispute was a wholesome development. The ground work for this new attention to the sources had already been laid by evangelism, the humanistic reform, and the spirituality of the *devotio moderna*. But Humanism and the Reformation challenged the plethora of authorities, whose force had been taken for granted, in the name of the one and only authority. Humanism did it out of concern for historical criticism and an historical approach to word-of-mouth tradition. The reformationists did it out of concern for the Gospel.

The automatic acceptance of authority, as it had prevailed up to then, was destroyed once and for all. Now the medieval authorities became the *loci theologici*, as Cano labelled them in accordance with the humanist tradition.<sup>6</sup> Many within Catholic theology (Cano, de Vittoria, Petavius) sharply criticized scholastic methodology as they knew it.

<sup>5</sup>Y. CONGAR, "Théologie," in *DThC*, XV/1, 406ff.

<sup>6</sup>A. LANG, *Die 'loci theologici' des Melchior Cano* (Munich Studies in Historical Theology; Vol. 6), Munich 1925, pp. 55-73.

In these circumstances, the appeal to Thomas Aquinas surely represented a step forward. But even his methodology was not slavishly followed. The baroque scholasticism of the sixteenth and seventeenth century was, in this respect, a new type of theological methodology. Historical arguments were strung together into chains, and later writers would use them in short-hand fashion: "So says Suarez, with fifty others." Now the aim was to establish the *perpetuité de la foi* (Bossuet) over against heretical novelty and historical criticism. Since the eighteenth century, Catholic theology has had to produce many historical contributions, and they have won recognition from many outside disciplines.<sup>7</sup>

Yet this enormous historical labor of modern theology remained theologically unfruitful in large measure. This was not due to the great men who labored during that period (e.g. Denifle, Ehrle, Baeumker, Grabmann, Funk); it was just not the right moment in history. Even when their work should have suggested emendations and new beginnings, the necessary but one-sided aura of apologetics kept them from bearing fruit. The positive theology of this period, though

<sup>7</sup>M. GRABMANN, *Die Geschichte der katholischen Theologie seit dem Ausgang der Väterzeit*, Freiburg 1933, pp. 185–192, 203; Y. CONGAR, "Théologie," in *DThC*, XV/1, 426ff.

it contributed much, was wholly characterized by a tendency to look back to the past. Many historical monographs only served to back up an already formulated thesis.<sup>8</sup> Scholars hoped to drown the opposing viewpoint under a flood of witnesses.

The exploitation of the historical method by apologetics caused this method to betray its own purpose: it now used historical arguments to argue unhistorically. Historical thinking is essentially critical<sup>9</sup> in nature. It seeks to know "how it really was." It seeks to carefully separate later overlays from the original painting. It calls attention to changes in the questioning process and to shifts in the meaning of words, hoping thereby to provide its contemporaries with new and better opportunities for man's understanding of himself and the world.

Properly understood, historical criticism is always set in motion by a contemporary issue. It is a type of present-day criticism from beginning to end, raising questions about the prevailing *sensus communis*. If, on the other hand, it is expropriated for apologetic purposes, this must necessarily give rise to conflicts between

<sup>8</sup>K. RAHNER, "Ueber den Versuch eines Aufrisses einer Dogmatik," in *Schriften zur Theologie*, I, Einsiedeln 1954, pp. 16-23.

<sup>9</sup>H. G. FRITZSCHE, *Die Strukturtypen der Theologie: Eine kritische Einführung in die Theologie*, Göttingen 1961, pp. 81-167.

historical theology and dogmatic theology; for in such a case history will always be overly burdened with the weight of theology. That is why the problem of faith and history took on such enormous proportions at the turn of this century.

My question is this: Has the crisis arisen, in large part, because people have tried to burden historical research with the task of providing dogmatic proof—a task which historical research is not in a position to carry out? Historical methodology cannot presume to exhibit the one final authority amid the many authorities; only theology, with the “eyes of faith” can undertake to do that. Moreover, the historical approach has also been misused by theology for purely apologetic purposes. But it balks at performing a basically theological task. It casts a spotlight on *quod erat demonstrandum*, but it contributes almost nothing to the clarification of real theological issues.

We should adopt a different outlook. We should respect the labyrinthine diversity of tradition, as it has taken shape in history. We should regard the alterations and differentiations of history as a positive force. Only in this way can we have a chance to integrate our understanding

of the faith, now debilitated and caught in a dead end, into a unified whole.

In doing this, we shall discover an immanent process of demythologization and interpretation at work within the history of tradition. In the transition from the Old to the New Testament, from Scripture to church tradition, and from the medieval to the modern outlook, we shall discover revelation involved in a process of "self-interpretation".<sup>10</sup> If we pay attention to the historical, conceptual and ontological perspective from which dogmatic statements evolved in the past, then we shall be able to divest our present *sensus fidei* of many peripheral problems.

Having done this, we could then set out to collate the varied traditions and authorities, and to probe for the *one* unarticulated, beclouded tradition underlying them. The manifold witnesses, conceptual frameworks, concepts and idioms should be comprehended in the light of their theological intent and their true scope. The history of dogma could profit greatly from the methods which became part of exegesis a long time ago. Besides simply repeating the clear and

<sup>10</sup>J. RATZINGER, "Ein Versuch zur Frage des Traditionsbegriffs," in (Rahner and Ratzinger) *Offenbarung und Ueberlieferung* (Quaestiones Disputatae, Vol. 25), Freiburg 1965, pp. 40-46.

oft asserted teachings of tradition, we could also investigate the detours and side-roads of this history, the realm of debated notions and half-expressed ideas. In this way we could open up new potentialities for our present and future understanding of the faith.<sup>11</sup>

The result would be that the historical method would have a real role to play and could prove fruitful for theology. Historical theology would not only positively ascertain the *fides credenda*; it would also serve the *intellectus fidei*. Historical theology would then be a real facet of systematic theological inquiry. In endeavoring to exhibit revelation's process of self-interpretation in history, it could point a finger to the *nexus mysteriorum* (DS 3016). To do this, however, positive theology must be more than a process of compilation. It must use theological delicacy and finesse; and, in the last analysis, we cannot set up absolutely demonstrable criteria for these traits.

- This method of historical dialectics was worked out by B. Pascal, J. E. Kuhn, J. H. Newman (in particular) and, more recently, by B. Welte.
- It bears a relation to the approach of contem-

<sup>11</sup>B. WELTE, "Die Wesensstruktur der Theologie als Wissenschaft," in *Auf der Spur des Ewigen*, Freiburg 1965, pp. 359–62; *idem*, "Ein Vorschlag zur Methode der Theologie heute," *ibid.*, 410–26.

porary hermeneutic inquiry as exemplified by H. G. Gadamer. In this approach, historical insight is not achieved by abstracting from present-day questions entirely and immersing oneself wholly and impartially in the creative process of the historical author; instead, it is directed by a current interest in the subject, which historical inquiry inspires and maintains.<sup>12</sup>

Thus our current theological questions have a maieutic function for historical inquiry; they help to clarify the background of history. The unsatisfactory nature of many historical studies is grounded in their authors' unawareness of a theological problem. But this does not mean that the author should engage in purely personal interpretation. Just as historical research is fruitful for theology only when it is animated theologically, so theological speculation needs to be bridled by sound historical studies. Only then will it stick to the real point, learn new things, and correct and correlate old beliefs instead of merely confirming age-old theses.

<sup>12</sup>H. G. GADAMER, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Tübingen 1965<sup>2</sup>, pp. 250–360; R. BULTMANN, "Das Problem der Hermeneutik," in *Glauben und Verstehen*, II, Tübingen 1952, pp. 211–35; *idem*, "Ist voraussetzungslose Exegese möglich?" *ibid.*, III, Tübingen 1960, pp. 142–50.

The possibility of theology's progress in this area (historical research) is ultimately grounded in the fact that *anamnesis, memoria*, remembrance is the essence of the human psyche.<sup>13</sup> Man's transcendental openness to the absolute mystery of being is an empty abstraction in itself. It becomes concrete and real only when man moves beyond the present into the new, unknown world of the past. Man's discovery of his previously unknown past alters his present and provides him with a potentially new future. By the same token, he can only find answers for his questions about the future by finding something open, unrealized and undischarged up to the present.

Viewed in this light, historical recollection has nothing to do with museum history. It is animated by the human spirit's thrust towards the

<sup>13</sup>This platonic-augustinian idea was developed greatly on the speculative plane in German idealism. It crops up again in Heidegger's "Andenken". Here the notion of recollection involves two things:

a. The spirit comes into its own only by encountering tradition. Tradition alone opens the pathway to truth for the spirit (see footnote 6, Chap. 1).

b. In this encounter with history, recollection takes place. The external tradition is actively interiorized and thus truly becomes tradition proper. Only ever new historical interpretation can provide tradition with continuity and identity. Such a notion of tradition has nothing to do with museum-type traditionalism; instead, it involves looking towards the future.

new and by its power to stand outside itself (*ek-stasis*), which the historical question releases.

Now it is not just human thought that is essentially historical remembrance leading us into the future. Kerygma, which theology serves, is essentially recollection and eschatological, prognostic promise also.<sup>14</sup> Theological recollection does not deal simply with *bruta facta* and *dicta probantia*; it deals with unique events which set forth a promise that is valid once—for all time. This is true of the salvation events, and it is also true of dogmatic definitions. The latter cannot purport to block off the road to truth which lies ahead of us; their purpose is to keep this road open and passable in the face of interpretations which would militate against it. Theological recollection must continually query its object on the promise which it holds out for contemporary man's questions about salvation.

Let us summarize what we have said about the role of history in theology:

1. The road which dogmatic theologians (as hermeneutic investigators) must take from the once-for-all event of revelation to Christian proclamation today is the path of historical

<sup>14</sup>W. KASPER, "Schrift, Tradition, Verkündigung," in *Umkehr und Erneuerung*, edited by Th. Filthaut, Mainz 1966, pp. 21–41.

recollection. This journey is set in motion by asking ourselves about the future of this proclamation.

2. This process of recollection is not simply historical argument or historical proof. As an historical question, it must be set in motion by the theological issue. In this manner, it will contribute to further objective elucidation of the theological questioning process itself.

Now we are ready to tackle the third essential element in the theological method: the *ratio theologica*. This brings us to the real problem of theological understanding and to the goal of theological methodology: our current understanding of the faith.

## THE GOAL OF METHODOLOGY

It is here we run into the most perplexing and complicated objections to our present-day methodology. Speculative theology is hardly popular today. The practical mind regards it as abstract and unfruitful; the theoretician regards it as the theological cultivation of an outdated metaphysics and as the domination of faith by Greek philosophical notions.

We shall presume the reader's familiarity with the broad outlines of the history of theology. J. Beumer<sup>1</sup> has shown that acceptance of Aristotle's theory of knowledge led theologians from the *intellectus fidei* of patristic and medieval times to the *ratio theologica* of thesis theology (i.e. premiss and conclusion). To overstate the case: thesis theology did not lead people further into the faith; instead it went beyond faith and sought to deduce logical arguments and conclusions.

<sup>1</sup>J. BEUMER, *Theologie als Glaubensverständnis*, Würzburg 1953, pp. 57–93; G. SÖHNGEN, "Die Einheit der Theologie in Anselms Proslogion," in *Die Einheit in der Theologie*, Munich 1952, pp. 24–62.

- › The new trend is to be found in the work of Thomas Aquinas himself; it led to the unavoidable construction of a *scientia subalternata*, which created problems rather than solving them. Thomas' work, to be sure, the end product turned out to be far better than the hapless method it might allow us to hope for. For Thomas, the fundamental premisses, from which conclusions were to be derived, were the central articles of faith. By contrast, the conclusions were derived from articles of faith that were less central to Christian belief. In this view, thesis theology basically encompassed what we call positive theology; it sought to demonstrate the inner connection between the truths of faith themselves rather than to draw up more or less definable statements.<sup>2</sup>

As A. Lang has shown, our present understanding of the *conclusio theologica* took shape only after Trent.<sup>3</sup> Underlying this more modern conception of the *ratio theologica* was the legitimate but poorly executed desire to reconcile the articles of faith with the new process of historical

<sup>2</sup>J. BEUMER, "Konklusionstheologie?" in *ZKTh*, 1939, 63: 360–65; E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Offenbarung und Theologie*, Mainz 1965, pp. 96f.

<sup>3</sup>A. LANG, "Die conclusio theologica in der Problemstellung der Spätscholastik," in *DTh*, 1944, 22: 257–90; V. HEYNCK, "Die Beurteilung der conclusio theologica bei den Franziskanertheologen des Trierer Konzils," in *Franziskanische Studien*, 1952, 34: 146–205; E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Offenbarung und Theologie*, Mainz 1965, pp. 55–67, 109–118.

questioning. Lacking the necessary historical categories, theologians sought to do this by deducing ingenious conclusions.

This led to a "theology of Esau", as G. Söhngen calls it: the firstborn object of theology (the divine truths of faith) was thrust aside in favor of the newly arrived Aristotelian *scientia conclusiōnum*.<sup>4</sup> Behind this development lay a distinctively modern conception of the nature of *ratio*.

Having said that much, we now find ourselves on unsure historical footing. The intellectual backdrop of baroque scholasticism—its ties with Wolffianism, Cartesianism, and the rationalism and idealism of a later day—has not yet been thoroughly explored. One might well hesitate to go so far as K. Eschweiler and G. Siewerth,<sup>5</sup> who look here for the roots of rationalism and idealism. But M. Wundt's careful study<sup>6</sup> does point up clearly the highly rational and abstract bent of this thought, its conceptual optimism,

<sup>4</sup>G. SÖHNGEN, *Philosophische Einübung in die Theologie*, Freiburg-Munich, 1955, pp. 125f.

<sup>5</sup>K. ESCHWEILER, *Die Philosophie der spanischen Spätscholastik auf den deutschen Universitäten des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Spanish Studies of the Görres Society, Series I, Volume 1), Münster 1928; *idem*, *Die zwei Wege der neueren Theologie*, Augsburg 1926, pp. 29–80; G. SIEWERTH, *Das Schicksal der Metaphysik von Thomas zu Heidegger*, Einsiedeln 1959, pp. 119–95.

<sup>6</sup>M. WUNDT, *Die deutsche Schulmetaphysik des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Tübingen 1939; see also Y. CONGAR, "Théologie," in *DThC*, XV/1, 417ff.

its analytic and schematizing approach, its mathematical cast, and its tendency towards superficial order and clarity rather than intrinsic, objective coherence.

- It is worth noting that the word “system” became a favorite term for scholarly methodology in the seventeenth century.<sup>7</sup> It is not without reason that baroque scholasticism found Raymond Lull’s *ars combinatoria* congenial,<sup>8</sup> and that contemporary Jesuit theology saw its affinity to Leibniz’s *mathesis universalis*. Baroque scholasticism was definitely a product of its time. Therein lies its inner grandeur, when viewed in the framework of the history of ideas.
- To criticize and elaborate on this type of speculative theology, we must consider three things:
  1. The historical character of human thought in general, which has long been overlooked;
  2. The historical character of theological speculation in particular;
  3. The relationship between theology and philosophy in history.
- Because of its highly rational and abstract bent,

<sup>7</sup>O. RITSCHL, *System und systematische Methode in der Geschichte des wissenschaftlichen Sprachgebrauchs und der philosophischen Methodologie*, Bonn 1906.

<sup>8</sup>F. STEGMÜLLER, “Barockscholastik,” in *LThK*, 1957, 1: 1269f.

speculative theology soon moved away from the concrete life of the Church and the real problems of men. We now begin to find more fruitful theology in the contemporary mystics than in the official theology of the schools. As early as the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when baroque scholasticism was already beginning to wane, we find bishops and general chapters<sup>9</sup> severely criticizing theology for its pastoral sterility and its spiritual poverty.

The utilitarian emphasis of the Enlightenment era may seem rather low-brow to us today. But behind it lay a profound insight into the concrete, historical character of truth. Enlightenment was not regarded as a useful intellectual exercise; it was regarded as a concrete, imperative task.<sup>10</sup>

During this period, the insights of the humanist tradition took a concrete hold over men's minds. Over against scholastic logic and dialectics, which it regarded as barbaric, Humanism recognized that truth always acquires its *Sitz im Leben* in concrete sociological and anthropological

<sup>9</sup>S. MERKLE, *Die kirchliche Aufklärung im katholischen Deutschland*, Berlin 1910, pp. 47-72.

<sup>10</sup>Die *Aufklärung*, selected texts, with introductions by G. FUNKE, Stuttgart 1963. pp. 4f.

conditions. Men began to discover the pragmatic, existential character of truth.

It is interesting to note that many people turned their attention to the rhetoric of Cicero once again, while the scholastics wrote commentaries on Aristotle's logic but not on his rhetoric and poetics. (The Stagirite had regarded the latter works, too, as places where truth might be gleaned.) The perceptions of humanism found philosophical expression in the works of Vico, Herder and Humboldt, and ultimately penetrated deeply into our modern philosophy of language.<sup>11</sup>

The notions developed in the philosophy of language have found little echo in present-day theology, aside from the work of G. Söhngen.<sup>12</sup> The situation is different in Protestant theology, particularly in the school of Bultmann,<sup>13</sup> where thinkers have recognized the kerygmatic character of theological truth. A pastorally oriented theology, centered around salvation history and

<sup>11</sup>K. O. APEL, *Die Idee der Sprache in der Tradition des Humanismus von Dante bis Vico* (Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte, Vol. 8), Bonn 1963.

<sup>12</sup>G. SÖHNGEN, *Analogie und Metapher: Kleine Philosophie und Theologie der Sprache*, Freiburg-Munich, 1962.

<sup>13</sup>See especially the works of E. FUCHS and G. EBELING. Overall treatments: H. NOACK, *Sprache und Offenbarung*, Gütersloh 1960; H. R. SCHWEFE, *Die Sprache und das Wort*, Hamburg 1961.

aware of its true nature and purpose, could benefit greatly from contact with these ideas.

We find an attempt to evaluate the *ratio theologica* from an historical perspective in the work of J. E. Kuhn. He sees speculative theology as an extension of the thrust and immanent dynamics of positive, historical theology. Kuhn, to be sure, does view this historical dialectic from a one-sided intellectualist standpoint. But speculative theology may also be regarded as a reflection on the historical past of the faith in the light of its potential future—i.e. its intelligibility and realizability in the contemporary situation of the Church and the human race.

Theory and practice cannot really be separated from each other. The practical application is a structuring element of truth itself (H. G. Gadamer); truth is meant not only to interpret the world but also to change it (K. Marx). Theology does not become more scientific by haughtily avoiding all concrete, practical questions.

This does not mean that sober, abstract thought is to be denigrated. On the contrary, it is only in this way that it can assume its rightful place. The common teaching of scholastic philosophy, in fact, is that abstract concepts acquire meaning in

the *conversio ad phantasma*,<sup>14</sup> in being tied up with the concrete object once again. If they remain detached from concrete objects and are ploughed right back into further abstract speculation, then they lose their concrete *Sitz im Leben* and become substitutes for reality. One would have to admit that theology has often failed to see this danger.

- In these revolutionary days we simply must probe all our theological concepts in depth, asking how relevant and how meaningful they are for our concrete practice of the faith. Even the central concepts of theology—grace, salvation, sin, God—have become empty words to a large extent. They do not say anything to men, and they have no foundation in the realm of experience. They often seem to represent a set of values which cannot be discovered experientially in the Christian's life of faith in history.
- Present-day philosophical hermeneutics and the biblical notion of truth share a common insight: both take note of the historical character of truth. This brings us to our second point—the historical character of theology's quest for truth.
- The Bible's outlook on truth is marked by a

<sup>14</sup>K. RAHNER, *Geist in Welt*, Munich 1957<sup>2</sup>, pp. 236–331.

characteristic conviction: truth is not something we simply know or talk about, it is something we can and must carry out in practice. Truth and fidelity are closely tied together. A thing is true if it actually turns out to be what it purports to be. A thing is true if it has permanence and stability, if it stands the test of time. Thus the biblical notion of truth is characterized by its temporal orientation. It is concerned with things that have happened or will happen, not with things that are what they are by nature. In the biblical view, truth is an historical phenomenon and, ultimately, an eschatological promise.<sup>15</sup>

And what about the content of the biblical notion, whose general outlook we have just described? We find that its content, too, is tied up with history. What is the content of faith, the object of speculative theology? It is not a plethora of general principles and universal truths. It is a series of historical promises and the salvation events which turn them into reality—all pointing to an ultimate and definitive consummation.

If intellectual contemplation involves setting different truths off against each other and then reconciling them with each other, then theological speculation must involve integrating all the

<sup>15</sup>W. KASPER, *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes*, Mainz 1965, pp. 65-84.

individual articles of faith into the one eschatological mystery of God which unfolds in history.<sup>16</sup> This christological and eschatological emphasis would seem to be more important and more necessary than a continuing development of theses and conclusions such as we find today. If all our theological statements are viewed as historical explications and interpretations of Christ's salvific promise, then men will be able to comprehend and assimilate the truths of faith once again.

The historical nature of biblical truth calls for a speculative approach which regards history as the ultimate backdrop of truth. If speculative theology adopts this outlook, it will be drawing closer to a basic tendency in present-day philosophy—the tendency to view being as time and time as being.<sup>17</sup> This revolutionary "temporal" outlook in modern thought may pose dangers to theology; but it also offers theology new possibilities that are more in line with the biblical

<sup>16</sup>The Decree on Training for the Priesthood, *Optatam Totius Ecclesiae*, urges that all theological disciplines (n. 16) "experience a renewal from a more vital contact with the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation." No. 14 says that all ecclesiastical studies should open up the minds of students "more and more to the mystery of Christ, which affects the whole history of mankind . . . ."

<sup>17</sup>M. MÜLLER, *Existenzphilosophie im geistigen Leben der Gegenwart*, Heidelberg 1964<sup>3</sup>, pp. 37–62, 160–83; J. B. METZ, "Theologie," in *LThK*, 1965, 10: 66f.

outlook on truth and reality than a static philosophy of nature and perduring essences would be.

Right now, of course, we cannot fathom the full implications of this revolutionary new approach. We are starting out on a new road, experiencing both the birth pangs and the joy of a new life.

We already have a new outlook on being, which has moved beyond the categories of cosmos and nature and has come to regard freedom, time and history as the most comprehensive framework.<sup>18</sup> In this outlook, we are not dealing with accidental changes in a perduring system of essences; on the contrary, nature and being only become real within the all-embracing cloak of history. Thus the theologian can look on the mystery of God's gracious freedom unfolding in history as the ultimate ground and depth of all reality.

Another question arises here. Is such an historically oriented speculative approach possible? Thus we come to our third point: the relationship between theology and philosophy in history. Once again we are back at our initial

<sup>18</sup>The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the World of Today, *Gaudium et Spes*, recognizes that "the human race is involved in a new phase of history" (n. 4), that "the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one" (n. 5).

question about the relationship between truth and history. The course of modern theological development has left us with a still unsolved problem that must be reconsidered afresh.

The question is all the more urgent because we are confronted with a radical attempt to historicize existence so completely that no fast and perduring metaphysical norms would remain. Is theology to be dissolved in this historical soup?

- Will an historically oriented theology not raise doubts about the universal validity of the faith
- and its dogmatic formulations? Since the process of historicizing human thought and human life is often described as the “end of metaphysics”,<sup>19</sup> it raises questions about the relationship of theology to philosophy, particularly to the metaphysical tradition of Western thought. What judgment are we to pass on the history of theology in this respect?

Current talk about the end of metaphysics is not a new idea, and it is quite ambiguous. Does it signify the death knell of metaphysics, or does it simply mean that the old outlook is being

<sup>19</sup>The notion of the end of metaphysics is propounded by different schools of thought for different reasons, by neo-kantianism, psychological and sociological theorists, and the philosophy of Heidegger. On this whole question see M. MÜLLER, “Ende der Metaphysik,” in *Existenzphilosophie im geistigen Leben der Gegenwart*, Heidelberg 1964<sup>3</sup>, pp. 184-259.

subsumed into a new outlook which probes more deeply into the old questions? In the last analysis, we can only talk about the end of a particular metaphysics. The end of metaphysics can only mean that we are salvaging the intrinsic historicity of metaphysical thought from the false trap of a *philosophia perennis* and a *theologia perennis*.

A truly historical outlook cannot dispense with metaphysical categories. In his later thought Schelling rejected Hegel's attempt to dissolve everything substantial in a giddy merry-go-round of dialectics. He recognized that such an outlook necessarily remains ambivalent, that it eventually ends up at the other extreme—as an unhistorical outlook propounding the myth of eternal return.<sup>20</sup>

As G. Krüger has pointed out most recently,<sup>21</sup> history presupposes something which is in a process of becoming and which cannot simply cut itself off from what it was or what it will be. In the last analysis, history as such can only be conceived in terms of the tension between infinity and finiteness, the ontological difference between

<sup>20</sup>W. KASPER, *Das Absolute in der Geschichte: Philosophie und Theologie der Geschichte in der Spätphilosophie Schellings*, Mainz 1965.

<sup>21</sup>G. KRÜGER, "Die Geschichte im Denken der Gegenwart," in *Freiheit und Weltverwaltung*, Freiburg-Munich 1958, p. 97.

being and becoming, the interplay between freedom and constraint through tradition, and the interaction between individual and society.<sup>22</sup> Man must always ask these basic metaphysical questions about the purpose of his existence and being as a whole, even if these questions are articulated differently throughout history.<sup>23</sup>

- » What this means is that an authentic historical outlook has nothing to do with relativism or scepticism. History does not rule out tradition, social ties, and basic metaphysical structures; it includes these elements, even if it does so in an historical rather than a static framework.<sup>24</sup>
- » Theology cannot dispense with universally valid metaphysical categories any more than philosophy can. Theology views everything within the framework of a universal, eschatological promise. Thus, from the start, it is historical through and through. But if the universality of this salvific history is not simply to mean that a particular truth is propounded apodictically as a universally valid truth, then we must preserve the universality of this promise in our thinking
- » also. If theology is not to retire into freely chosen

<sup>22</sup>A. DARLAP, "Geschichtlichkeit," in *LThK*, 1960, 4: 781.

<sup>23</sup>Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 10.

<sup>24</sup>J. B. LOTZ, "Von der Geschichtlichkeit der Wahrheit," in *Scholastik*, 1952, 27: 481–503.

isolation, then it must be able to show that its statements concretize, outstrip and fulfill the elements of anticipation and longing that stand out in the basic structures of every history.

If theology wants to show that Christ is truly the *concretum universale*, then its statements must have substance.<sup>25</sup> It can show, for example, that the cross of Christ is foreshadowed in a basic pattern which pervades the pages of human history: sacrificing oneself in order to win victory. In Christian faith, the naked, empty cross is occupied by Christ. Thus the cross no longer represents man's crucifixion but his exaltation;<sup>26</sup> it is a gratuitous, new historical opportunity to understand and practice what it means to be a human being. In like manner, the proofs for the existence of God would seem to provide a universally comprehensible backdrop for the biblical message of God.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup>W. KAMLAH, *Christentum und Geschichtlichkeit*, Stuttgart 1951<sup>2</sup>, pp. 85–100; H. URS VON BALTHASAR, "Christlicher Universalismus," in *Verbum Caro: Skizzen zur Theologie*, I, Einsiedeln 1960, pp. 260–75; *idem*, *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Aesthetik*, Vol. 3/1, Einsiedeln 1965, pp. 943–83.

<sup>26</sup>TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, *Der göttliche Bereich* (The Divine Milieu), Olten 1962, pp. 109–113; J. RATZINGER, "Gratia supponit naturam: Erwägungen über Sinn und Grenze eines scholastischen Axioms," in *Einsicht und Glaube*, edited by J. Ratzinger and H. Fries, Freiburg 1962, pp. 147–49.

<sup>27</sup>G. EBELING, "Existenz zwischen Gott und Gott," in *ZThK*, 1965, 62: 91f.

- Theology can preserve its identity only if it has the courage to immerse itself in the alien realm of philosophy—not to commit suicide there or to degenerate into a philosophy of religion, but to truly find itself. In losing itself, theology will be able to show how its faith overcomes the world (1 Jn 5, 4). In other words, theology cannot be reflected in the common heritage of human thought unless it moves this heritage beyond itself as well.

Thus the relationship and interaction between philosophy and theology is not a static reality that is fixed once and for all. It is a relationship that is constantly reworked through the course of history. It, too, is an historical process. However much theology may need metaphysical categories, it cannot tie itself to a specific metaphysics if it is to remain its true self.

When we criticize traditional theology, we cannot simply reproach its philosophical cast and regard it as an illegitimate hellenization of Christian belief. The use of hellenic notions was a necessary hermeneutic process at that point in history. The interaction between theology and philosophy in the thirteenth century was also an historical achievement, even though we cannot allow the process to freeze at that stage. It gave

rise to a radically new self-awareness within both fields, so that questions are posed differently to-day in both.

The same holds true for modern theology well into the eighteenth century. Baroque scholasticism not only renovated earlier scholasticism but also sought to dialogue with Wolff, Descartes and Leibniz. Kant's ideas were welcomed in the schools of Würzburg and Salzburg. The ideas of Schelling and Hegel found ready listeners in the Tübingen school. It was only in relatively recent times that this creative interaction came under a cloud of suspicion, that thinkers failed to appreciate the historical character of metaphysics and the mutual relationship between philosophy and theology. Through this unhistorical outlook, theology bade farewell to the intellectual currents of the day and it was no longer able to fulfill its real purpose.

Jesus Christ is the unique and irreducible concretization of history's universal essence; from him light is reflected on the otherwise ambivalent and allusive signposts of history. This being the case, the theologian must be a gadfly amid the intellectual currents of his day; for they all too easily tend to become absorbed in themselves.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup>J. B. METZ, "Theologie," in *LThK*, 1965, 10: 69.

The theologian may have to pose metaphysical questions to keep contemporary thought open and receptive.

- Countering objections to the faith has been the time-honored task of speculative theology.
- But it is not meant to be merely a matter of defending the faith; it is meant to render service to human society. The defense of the faith (apologetics) is meant to be a defense of man and his freedom when he is being threatened.<sup>29</sup> Faith proves its case by proving its mettle when it is confronted with the concrete questions of a threatened human race. Historically oriented theology serves mankind and its salvation.

Let us sum up our remarks on the speculative methodology of dogmatic theology by relating them to several assertions of Vatican I. The latter assertions, of course, are taken in an historical perspective.

- The aim of speculative theology is to comprehend faith's universal claim in a concrete intellectual situation. This is achieved in three ways:

<sup>29</sup>Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 76: "The Church . . . is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person . . . By preaching the truths of the Gospel, and bringing to bear on all fields of human endeavor the light of her doctrine and of a Christian witness, she respects and fosters the political freedom and responsibility of citizens."

1. The articles of faith prove to be the universal, concrete embodiment and fulfillment of history's questions. They are comprehended "*ex eorum quae naturaliter cognoscit analogia.*"
2. The articles of faith prove to be capable of protecting man's freedom and of answering his questions about the meaning of human life; they are comprehended "*e nexu cum fine hominis ultimo.*"
3. Faith becomes intrinsically comprehensible through a *reductio in mysterium*. All its individual statements are resolved, christologically and eschatologically, into the unique mystery of God. Faith is comprehended "*e mysteriorum nexu inter se*" (DS 3016).

This brings our inquiry to a close, and we can sum it up very briefly. The historical and speculative methods of dogmatic theology are two aspects of a single historical-hermeneutic process. To be sound and fruitful, historical inquiry within theology must be theologically inspired. Speculative thought must be viewed as concrete, historical thought. Dualism in theology (historical methods *versus* speculative methods, essence *versus* existence) is not to be given permanent recognition, for we can move beyond it.

Dogmatic methodology does not start out by

asking purely historical, positive questions and then move on to purely speculative, philosophical questions. It has its own normative tradition, which distinguishes it from philosophical speculation; it has its own formal object, which distinguishes it from pure historical criticism.

➤ Dogmatic theology is the “transmission of the faith to an ever enduring present” (J. S. Drey).

Today the role of a real and living tradition

➤ is particularly urgent. In faith's confrontation with today's world, dogmatic theology must therefore become more “*quaestio*” and less “*thesis*”. It must dare to ask deeper and more biting questions, even when the answers are not

➤ yet in sight. It must go beyond its ready-made concepts to the underlying reality; it must become in truth *fides quaerens intellectum*.

The wonder of faith is that its *certitudo super omnia* permits and even calls for such a questioning process. The world of myths comes apart under the piercing inquiry of the *logos*; the biblical *dabar Yahweh* feels no antipathy or discomfort when the light of reason breaks upon it.

➤ Strong in the faith and supported by the Church, the theologian is free to ask whatever he will. His sense of humor has been set free, as it were, and he can savor the delight of question-

ing everything. It is no wonder, then, that the greatest methodologist in Western theology, Anselm of Canterbury, concludes his *Proslogion* with a comment on joy.

Much has been said about our present methodology in this book, and it has been criticized on various counts. But the most serious criticism of all may well be that theology has become so faint-hearted and distrustful, so morose and humorless.